

## The right March

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«Let us sat compliments to each other» - this famous Russian poetry line by Bulat Okudzhava may be used to describe the announcement of unification of the two parts of the Ukrainian People's Movement Rukh on June 9, 2001. At least, that is how it looked like at a glance.

«The People's Rukh of Ukraine (NRU) and the Ukrainian People's Rukh (UNR) announce the beginning of unification of our parties into a single electoral block within a broad electoral entity of national democratic forces for the 2002 parliamentary and local elections, and the unification into a single Rukh after the 2002 elections,» was solemnly declared in the document signed by the NRU and the UNR as equal political subjects.

The Declaration was signed at the II Congress of the UNR in the presence of 1,180 delegates. The event looked even more symbolic due to the fact that the officially signing procedure took place at the conference hall of the Kyiv Polytechnic, where the first ever assembly of the People's Rukh of Ukraine for Perestroika had taken place in 1989. The history of the document also deserves some attention. According to NRU leader Hennady Udovenko, he initially had consultations with UNR leader Yuri Kostenko: «The two of us were quietly writing it [i.e., the declaration] together. Then [we] involved [other Rukh leaders] Koval and Chervoniy. And they did not lose it, but subscribed to it.» Yuri Kostenko added that should the process of work over the document have been built differently, «there inevitably would be people who would hinder the process» (Ukraina Moloda, June 12, 2001). However, no details were given as to who those people are or what forces they represent.

Instead, other important developments could be observed. Ukraine's ousted reformer Prime Minister Victor Yushchenko attended the congress and confirmed that he intended «to work in the farwater of a future national democratic party» and «make the steps that would ensure consolidation of all democratic forces» (UNIAN, June 9, 2001). The «Ukrainian Prime Minister» described Udovenko's and Kostenko's decision to unite their parties as a «highly moral political deed that was expected by millions». Meanwhile, he did not give any clear answer to the question whether he intended to become an official leader of the right-wing coalition's electoral list. Having started with metaphors and images, Victor Yushchenko noted: «Who will lead [the block] is a matter of trust» and that the key point was that «we have launched the process for consolidation». It is still unclear whether the «process of consolidation» will develop with or without Yushchenko's direct involvement. Member of the Party of Reforms and Order, representative of the Cabinet of Ministers at the Verkhovna Rada Serhiy Sobolev described Yushchenko's habits of making political decisions as follows: «Yushchenko, possibly, differs from other politicians in a way that it is very difficult for him to make a decision for himself. But once he's made it he strictly sticks to his line. In other words, he is a man that harnesses his horses for a very long time. But then [he] rides very well» (Chas, June 1, 2001). Hence, the intrigue about who Yushchenko's «riding» partners during the forthcoming election race will be - the right-wingers or the centrists - remains. This context is further complicated with efforts of Speaker Ivan Pliushch to make a centrist electoral block «under Yushchenko» - a loose coalition that is expected to include members of the People's Democratic Party (led by pre-Yushchenko Premier Valery Pustovoitenko), the Agrarian Party (representatives of which follow their leader Kateryna Vashchuk and promptly leave the Democratic Union's faction in the parliament), and the Regions of Ukraine (led by head of the State Taxation Administration Mykola Azarov). If Yushchenko does agree to lead the block, the right-wingers will have to compete with their political icon at the election, and the competition will reduce their chances to succeed dramatically. So far Yushchenko has made no clear comments about his electoral plans, but did not exclude a possibility of running for a majoritarian constituency somewhere in central Ukraine. In that case Yushchenko is prepared to «sympathize» with the block by means of showing moral support and making good-wishing statements.

Noteworthy, President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma reacted strongly negatively to the news about the Declaration signed by the two Rukhs and described the fact as «a game» and a «farce under high slogans» (UNIAN, June 9, 2001). No comments are needed here.

It is likely that the would-be block will not make any substantial changes to Ukraine's electoral map, compared to the 1998 results. Then the Rukh took part in the race separately from other right-wing parties and managed to overcome the 4% threshold and form the parliament's second largest (after the communists) faction of 43 MPs. The Party of Reforms and Order, established in 1997, chose similar tactics and did not join any block, but failed to pass the 4% barrier, having received only 832,574 of over 32 million potential votes. The Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, then a member of the National Front electoral block, received only 721,966 votes.

It looks like election math shows that a coalition of Ukrainian right-wingers is able to receive much better results than in 1998. However, there are a number of new challenges right-wingers will have to face. Within the past three years a new political generation of competitors has matured: Ukrainian centrists that have much stronger financial and administrative resources compared to the right. The fact of growth of centrist parties - no matter how vague the definition of Ukrainian political «centrism» may be - should not be underestimated or ignored, as the right-winger's chances for succeeding in the election race depend greatly on their ability to be more adequate and consistent than their centrist competitors. Another challenge is the right-wingers' ability (or the lack of it) to form a single electoral list that would make all (or most of them) happy. Building an electoral block involves a number of difficult questions that need to be addressed, as the number of places in the single electoral list is limited. As the 1998 parliamentary election showed, the challenge became too strong for a number of political entities.

A single electoral block - if it is established - will be beneficial for both the UNR and the NRU, even though the announced unification is closely linked with the forthcoming election and, hence may raise suspicions about its sincerity. «The art of compromise» in interpretation of political competitors may look like a compromise in the interests of the players but not their potential voters. Even the modest results of the 1998 election may be difficult to achieve given the break-up of the Rukh that discredited its political activists in the eyes of their ordinary but confirmed voters. The dramatic decrease in popularity of both parts of the Rukh may be demonstrated by the poor performance of their leaders in the 1999 presidential election.

The political environment of the new declaration has been shaped by internal and external factors, primarily the two-year-old political partnership between the NRU and the PRP, and the close relations between the parliamentary factions of the NRU and the Reforms-Congress (PRP and CUN). At the end of November 2000 leaders of the NRU, PRP and CUN signed an agreement «On Key Foundations of Activities of the Block of the NRU, PRP and CUN». The agreement was reached for «development and adoption of joint program documents of the block of the NRU, PRP and the Congress at the forthcoming election to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the establishment of a common parliamentary faction.» According to PRP leader Victor Pynzenyk, the agreement involved «provisions for common foundations of activities of the three parties and the principle of formation of a joint electoral block» (Chas, December 1, 2000).

At the end of January 2001 leaders of the three right-wing parties announced that the block was «open for other parties» and that building a block was «possible only on specific foundations - common ideological principles, a common electoral platform, a common electoral list» (Chas, January 26, 2001).

The other Rukh, UNR, also has its own political allies outside the announced «open block», though political environment has undergone some major changes lately. In this sense, it is important to take into account the cooperation between the UNR and Yulia Tymoshenko's Batkivshchyna, their agreement about cooperation between their parliamentary factions and, finally, the officially established civil and political association, the «Ukrainian Pravytsya» (i.e., «the Right Hand»). The day of establishment of the Ukrainian Pravytsya, January 21, the day of Unification of Ukraine, was chosen to symbolize the importance of the event. Then the assembly was attended by almost 1,000 representatives of 11 political parties and over 20 NGOs. The Ukrainian Pravytsya was joined by the Ukrainian People's Rukh, the Batkivshchyna, the Ukrainian Republican Party, the Sobor, the Social National party, the Party of Ukrainian Unity, the Ukrainian Conservative Republican party, the Christian People's Union, and the Party for Support of National Manufacturers. The political parties were backed by a number of politicized NGOs, like the Ukrainian Prosvita Society, the Ukrainian Cossacks, the Ukrainian Student Association, the Union of Ukrainian Officers, the National Veteran

Association, the Young Rukh, the National Women's organization named after Olena Teliha... The forum received an additional political and emotional background from the dismissal, a few days earlier, of Vice Prime Minister for Fuel and Energy Yulia Tymoshenko, leader of the Batkivshchyna. The dismissal itself was condemned by the forum participants as an «anti-Ukrainian provocation». Given the circumstances, the Ukrainian Pravytsya was likely to become a vehement opposition to President Leonid Kuchma but not to then Prime Minister Victor Yushchenko who had been traditionally seen by right-wingers as their potential common leader. Noteworthy, then leaders of the NRU, PRP and CUN described the emergence of the Ukrainian Pravytsya as a certain «entropy moment». Then members of the NRU (who switched to the PRP later) Taras Chornovil argued that the «establishment of the Ukrainian Pravytsya with the involvement of small, often deconstructive parties» «hinders the expansion of the right block» (Den, January 26, 2001). However, one could not but see the growing distance and cooler relations between the UNR and the Batkivshchyna.

Further development of the political context, particularly the dismissal of the Yushchenko government and the right-wingers desire to convince Yushchenko to become their leader, promoted real political consolidation. The right-wingers seem to agree that Yushchenko, seen as a potential national political leader, cannot be expected to choose to lead an electoral list of some political party, but not a broad political coalition. While Yushchenko has not decided whether or not to lead the right-wingers, on April 20, 2001 leaders of the UNR, NRU, PRP and CUN announced they would take part in the forthcoming parliamentary election as a single block. UNR leader Yuri Kostenko added to the intrigue by stating that «Nowadays, discussions are in process about signing an agreement on unification of the Ukrainian Pravytsya, joined, among others, by the UNR and the Batkivshchyna, with the block of the NRU, the Reforms and Order, CUN» (UNIAN, April 20, 2001).

However, notwithstanding the invitation, Yulia Tymoshenko did not attend the recent congress of the UNR. The rapid reduction in number of their political contacts suggests that the Batkivshchyna might choose a different political niche for the election. Instead, the Batkivshchyna has demonstrated understanding with Oleksandr Moroz's Socialist party. The two parties approach the election period with similar PR actions, primarily the proposed referendum to question public trust in Leonid Kuchma. The right-wingers are overtly skeptical about the referendum idea. The NRU may be anything but delighted about the withdrawal of its whole district organization in Brody, the Lviv region, and their admission en masse to the Batkivshchyna. Members of the Brody organization of the NRU announced their full support for Yulia Tymoshenko and her party. While this is only an individual case, it should be seen as a signal that the Batkivshchyna may begin to grow at the expense of the right-wing parties.

A new interesting - «centrist» - tone was added to the UNR congress by the arrival of leader of the Solidarity party Petro Poroshenko who stated he viewed the future of the UNR and the NRU «with optimism» and that he did not exclude the possibility that the unification might result in the fact that «the new parliament will have more forces that will find a common language among themselves» (UNIAN, June 12, 2001). Current political reality has brought noticeable increase in frequency of contacts between the right-wingers and the Solidarity, and Poroshenko himself was rather consistently supportive of Yushchenko during the April government-parliament crisis. Seeing Yushchenko as a single leader may prove to be a rather strong cementing factor for further consolidation.

The formation of a right-wing coalition presents a number of unequivocal situations. Even the unification of the NRU and the UNR is seen as a highly complicated process, challenged by the party leaders' ambitions and external influences. Obviously, a number of local organizations of the Rukhs do not see the conflict as settled - which is admitted by leaders of both the NRU and the PRP. Apparently, the parties are facing a difficult period of reconciliation at the local level in order to form their electoral lists and agree on a common list with their political allies.

It is worth to note a rather complex attitude of some NRU activists to their declared partners from the PRP. For instance, head of the Apparatus of the Central Provid (Council) of the NRU Serhiy Konev was repeatedly quoted as saying that he «personally is doing everything possible for getting rid of the Party of Reforms and Order as a political partner» (Ukraina Moloda, June 8, 2001) claiming that the Rukh just has to «pull» the PRP. «Relations with our partners - the PRP and the CUN [i.e., the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists] appear to be - pardon! - some mouse squabbling compared to the start of the unification of the NRU and the UNR. If that happens, a coalition of national democratic forces will really arise,» Konev argued (Vlada i Polityka, June 15, 2001). The NRU congress in May demonstrated first signs of a likely conflict between the NRU and the PRP. «The so-called «center for

strategic development» [a nickname for the state security service, SBU] started unprecedented extra-statute activity, instigating grass-root Rukh activists for separatist actions provoking yet another plot. The worrying sign is that the group of plotters is joined by intriguants from the PRP,» (Studio 1+1, TSN, May 5, 2001) member of the NRU Georgy Petryk-Popyk announced at the Rukh congress. Then a number of personalities - Mykhailo Kosiv, Olena Bondarenko, Taras Chornovil - left the Rukh, and their arrival to the PRP was taken uneasily by the Rukh leaders. Later on, Hennady Udovenko publicly the above refuted Konev's claims that the PRP had had something to do with the initial split-up of the Rukh. Udovenko diplomatically noted that «the PRP is not interested in weakening the NRU» and added that he and Victor Pynzenyk «decided not to dramatize the situation» (Chas, June 1, 2001). So far, there has been no further development of the incident and no new «political divorce» in the right-wing sector.

Hence, the ability to find a compromise while forming the single electoral list will have a strong impact on the parties' chances to succeed in the election. Leader of the PRP Victor Pynzenyk announced that the final shape of the right-centrist block will be disclosed on October 12, 2001 - the day of official start of the race. Then, according to Pynzenyk, the national democratic parties will gather for a unification congress and announce the establishment of a broad coalition with a single electoral list. He also hinted that the list will contain «a number of interesting and, possibly, unexpected people» (UNIAN, June 11, 2001). It is still a question, however, what the voters will think about electoral chances of the «interesting and unexpected» right.